DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 373 HE 024 429

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TITLE Overseas Students: A Mutual Benefit. St. Catharine's Conference Report No. 20.
INSTITUTION King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Foundation of St. Catharine's, Windsor (England).
REPORT NO ISSN-0955-3517
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 14p.; Conference (April 1990) held at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor, England, United Kingdom.
AVAILABLE FROM Director of Studies, St. Catharine's Cumberland Lodge, The Great Park, Windsor, Berkshire, England SL4 2HP (1.00 pound, U.K.).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Enrichment; Cultural Exchange; *Educational Opportunities; Foreign Countries; *Foreign Students; Global Approach; Higher Education; *Student Experience; Student Problems; *Study Abroad
IDENTIFIERS *England

ABSTRACT

This document reports on a conference that focused on the problems and rewards encountered by overseas students studying in Britain. The conference aimed to explore the cultural and educational benefits, both within institutions and the society as a whole, of having overseas students present in British institutions of higher education. Papers focused primarily on the advantages provided by study abroad to the students themselves, to receiving institutions, and to the society in light of increasing internationalism of higher education throughout the world. Included are summaries of presentations, categorized as follows: "Keynote Address"; "The Internationalizing of Education"; "Cultural Interaction"; "The Academic Benefit"; and "Closing Address." A discussion group's suggestions for improving the overseas student experience are summarized, along with a panel session examining what students learn from each other. A list of conference participants and their affiliations is provided. (LPT)

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£1.00 ISSN 0955–3517

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OVERSEAS STUDENTS: A MUTUAL BENEFIT

A ST CATHARINE'S CONFERENCE HELD AT CUMBERLAND LODGE APRIL 1990

St Catharine's Conference Report No. 20

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Introduction

St Catharine's Conferences are an important part of the work of the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Foundation of St Catharine's. Each year six or seven such conferences are held, focussing on a variety of contemporary issues. Participation is by invitation and is intended to bring together people representative of all groups with an interest in these issues.

This conference was the second St Catharine's Conference concerned with overseas students. The first, held in September 1988 (see *Report* No. 12), concentrated on the problems and rewards that overseas students encountered in studying in this country. This conference aimed to explore the cultural and educational benefits, both within institutions and to society at large, of having overseas students here, and conversely, the benefits to students who choose to study abroad. This was felt appropriate as, since the introduction of full-cost fees, the immediate and potential economic advantages have tended to dominate in discussion. In the light of changes in fee arrangements for British students, and changes which have made Britain more accessible to students from the European Community, the economic advantages of attracting students from elsewhere are likely to lessen. It was thought worthwhile to explore the other benefits which derive from their presence in our institutions of higher education.

The speakers at the conference were:—

Professor Lalage Bown, OBE, Director of the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Glasgow

Dr Abraham Lue, MBE, Assistant Principal of King's College, London

HE Sir Roy Marshall, Kt, CBE, High Commissioner for Barbados in Great Britain and sometime Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hull

Dr Alastair Niven, Literature Director, Arts Council of Great Britain

Mrs Pauline Perry, Director of the South Bank Polytechnic

Sir Raymond Rickett, CBE, Director of the Middlesex Polytechnic.

The conference was chaired by **Tim Slack**, Principal of St Catharine's, who acknowledged in his introductory comments the generous contribution of **Lord Grade of Elstree** towards the costs of the conference.

Summary

The major focus of the papers presented at the conference was on the educational and cultural advantages provided by study abroad, to the students themselves, to receiving institutions and to society in general. This was placed in context by consideration of the increasing internationalism of higher education throughout the world, and its antecedents. Powerful personal statements were made from those who had benefited from their experiences as overseas students, in this country and elsewhere. The programme concluded with a reflective address from a speaker who, uniquely, had come here as an overseas student from what was then one of Britain's colonies, and had experienced the tribulations of higher education in this country in the eighties from the vantage of a Vice-Chancellor's office in one of its universities.

Not surprisingly, the theme which ran throughout was the great gains, both to the receiving country and to the students concerned, derived from the

international movement of students, and a major concern was that some would see these in largely financial terms. Reciprocity at all levels had to be the key.

Keynote Address

Apart from the mutuality implicit in the title of the conference — between the students and the society in which they found themselves — there was, thought **Sir Raymond Rickett**, another mutuality, and that was between countries, the countries that send students and those that receive them.

> *There is a mutuality between countries as well as between students and the society they visit*

Although once an overseas student himself, he had become deeply concerned with overseas student issues only when the government had decided to raise fees to the 'economic level'. Serving on the group which drafted the Green Paper from which emerged 'The Pym package' proved to be a valuable experience. Until then the overseas student experience was seen to be self-evidently good, but this had not been proven.

One might suggest that privileged young men of two centuries ago undertaking the European Grand Tour were the forerunners of today's overseas students, so that the notion is not new. Some of the advantages which today derive from students studying in countries other than their own are:

- In business and economics a knowledge of the law, social structures and business practices of other countries is clearly advantageous for those operating internationally. The ERASMUS scheme has done much to promote student interchange in these areas. Programmes offering joint qualifications for courses undertaken in more than one university are being developed and will contribute to job mobility.
- Students can study under leading scholars in other countries and experience a different academic tradition and modes of thought, providing a fresh dimension to understanding.
- Those in professional courses (medicine, architecture, engineering, etc.) will discover different practising traditions, which will lead them to question their own practices, whilst at the same time making them better able to compete in the market, nationally and internationally.

There is a need to convince those who supply the funds — governments and others in the countries that the students come from — of the worth to society of overseas study. Sir Raymond felt that overseas study at present tended to favour the well-off and the well-connected and it was necessary to convince politicians of the need to widen its scope. To have people with experience of living and studying abroad must be wholly to a country's advantage, and from the viewpoint of commerce it is essential to have people with a close understanding of the nations with which they trade.

> *There is a need to convince those who supply the funds of the worth to society of overseas study*

Sir Raymond then injected a personal note referring to the four years that he spent as a PhD student in Chicago:

> *"What did I get out of it? . . . [It] set in motion a set of changes in my life beyond anything I could imagine. I understood the American culture, met American people, sat in baseball games, was invited to American homes; I was part of the American system. You don't have to buy it all, you don't have to say it's perfect, it's silly even to pretend, but it was a stimulating experience for me. Whether my government liked it or whether it made any money out of it was of absolutely monumental unimportance to me. It was a tremendous and valuable experience for me — and that's the real argument!"*

In conclusion he referred to worries he had, that investment being made in Europe-related programmes could be to the disadvantage of the Developing World, and expanded on the advantages of student and staff movements between Britain and the developing countries. Too often this was seen as a one-way traffic, but students and staff from Britain who did work in those countries saw another world, another set of values, to their great personal advantage and to that of their institutions. Conversely, students from these countries who came here enriched our societies and helped change entrenched attitudes. We would be making a great mistake if, in turning to Europe, we were seen to be turning our back on the rest of the world.

> *Students should have stars in their eyes and be ruthlessly self-interested to make the most of the international experience*

► The relevance of some courses of study to the countries from which students came was an issue raised in discussion. Was there too much concern for state of the art technology when the reality in

many developing countries was of unreliable power supplies and making do with antiquated equipment? There was no question, thought Sir Raymond, that in this matter the students should 'have stars in their eyes' and be ruthlessly self-interested to make the most of the international experience. Students everywhere are introduced to research areas and sophisticated techniques and equipment unlikely to be encountered in everyday work experience.

Were not relations with Developing World universities too one-sided, and a form of academic imperialism, with Britain taking the best students and offering little reciprocity, preventing in this way the build-up of indigenous institutions? A move to counteract this is the recent decision of the Higher Education Committee of the British Council which encourages study for Masters and PhDs to be carried out partly in a university of the country of origin as well as in the UK, with degrees awarded by either university.

Is the non-European student not subsidising the domestic student?

Further reference was made to possible detrimental effects to Developing countries of Britain's increasing European involvement. Whereas students from the Community now pay the same fees as domestic students, fees for other overseas students were substantially higher. Was the non-European student not subsidising the domestic student? And was it unrealistic for developing country governments to see this as a new form of exploitation and to act accordingly?

The Internationalising of Education

Abraham Lue noted first that internationalism in education was not new — the great medieval universities such as Heidelberg, Padua and Oxford attracted students from all over Europe, aided by the use of Latin as the language of scholarship.

However, the title 'The Internationalising of Education' implies that there is a process in train which is novel in its manifestation and easily recognisable by all. Certainly scholars are increasingly mobile, whether historians drawn to study at the archives of Reims or Berkeley, or physicists who spend sabbaticals at CERN in Geneva or the Institute of Theoretical Physics in Trieste. But scholars have traditionally travelled for research: what is new is the internationalising of teaching and education in the sense of training.

In the past three decades there have been enormous changes in higher education in this country, not least the acceptance of the idea that all qualified to do so should be entitled to a university education. The needs of a more complex society have been reflected in a massive increase in the number and type of degree awarding institutions. That they should serve community needs has never been in doubt: the medieval universities provided scribes for government and the Victorian universities supplied the administrators of empire. Today they are expected to provide business administrators and to fill the ranks of the professions.

But in our dedication to training we must at some stage ask what we are training for? Three years is a short period of time; they should be used for training students in the on-going processes of acquiring knowledge, rather than attempt to impart the skills of a lifetime in their chosen profession. There is also need to encourage the broader education because between 18 and 21 we generally develop to the greatest degree our views on society, politics, religion and a personal philosophy. Whilst our teachers have a rôle, the real catalyst is in ourselves and in our peer group. It is a time in which interests and perspectives must be broadened. Education is not just about knowledge; it is also about understanding.

Overseas students add that flavour of internationalism which no university can discount

Overseas students, suggested Abraham Lue, were needed to help in the educative process of home students. And in teaching and research also, overseas students add that flavour of internationalism which no university can discount. We are nothing if not universal in our outlook and international in the standards to which we aspire.

At King's College overseas students make up 22% of the student population. They come from 92 countries, many with cultural traditions and economic and political stances very different from our own. Conditioned by these factors they will not necessarily agree with British students on issues which affect their lives. But it is important that their point of view is shared, discussed, and if not agreed, at least appreciated. To make the most of this it is necessary to ensure that the overseas student community is not swamped by a few countries. Geographical spread is important and there is also need to ensure that the students are spread throughout the faculties and not concentrated in subjects unpopular with home students.

The same reasons which bring foreign students here should encourage us to send British students to study abroad. With the development of the

European Community, collaborative courses involving study in two or more countries must be encouraged, as must collaboration in teaching and research under various EC schemes such as ERASMUS. A major impediment is the limited facility of British students in languages other than their own. The Language and Communications Centre set up at King's is addressing this problem and teaches five European languages as well as Mandarin and Japanese.

> *The same reasons which bring foreign students here should encourage us to send British students to study abroad*

Most governments — unfortunately not the British government — are well aware of the advantages of having students trained in other countries. For example, an intimate knowledge of another country can be of great advantage in diplomacy and business, and it can only be gained by spending time there.

Many states in Asia and the Americas, who have in the past looked to the United States as the main provider of overseas training, have come to realise that contacts with Europe are a potent force for the future and can be ignored only to their own long-term disadvantage. An American monoculture of influence is being broken down. Diversity is the new keyword: diversity of markets, of views and of influences. That is what internationalism brings.

> *Diversity — of markets, views and influences — is what internationalism brings*

► Concern about the present uneven geographical spread of students and the ways in which this might be corrected was a focus of discussion. A major problem was pressure to make overseas recruiting cost-effective: it was clearly productive to send teams to Malaysia or Hong Kong but not to Fiji or Botswana. There were many countries in which the scope for student recruitment was presently small but with which clear long term gains were to be derived from developing linkages. At present only the government can afford to make this seed corn investment.

Attention was also drawn to the changes likely in the next decade when, encouraged by EC initiatives, universities would have to adjust to the experience of having a large proportion of overseas students for short term periods and having a larger number of their own students studying abroad. There were problems in having a mobile student community: each university had its own character and imparted this to its students. If more than a minor part of their education were spent elsewhere, was there not danger of losing this feeling of belonging?

The development of European exchanges could increase further the imbalanced relationship between British universities and those in Third World countries. There was a need for more students and staff from our universities to study and work in those of the Third World.

Cultural Interaction

She was a passionate believer in the value of cultural interchange, said **Lalage Bown**, noting that in 1992 one important event to be commemorated would be the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas, seen as a discovery by us. All cultural exchange was a process of discovery, but there were always two sets of discoverers and the process is two-way.

> *All cultural exchange is a process of discovery — and the process is two way*

The possible results of culture contact were varied and could be summarised (see box).

Should we be trying to promote culture synthesis, or cosmopolitanism?

The conference itself was a marvellous form of cultural interaction, thought Lalage Bown, who went on to outline the bases of her approach to the topic:

Response	*Effect on Individual*	*Effect on Society*
1. Reject culture of origin, embrace second culture	Loss of ethnic identity Self-deprecation	Assimilation Cultural erosion
2. Reject second culture, exaggerate first	Nationalism Racism	Inter-group friction
3. Vacillate between two cultures	Conflict Identity confusion Over-compensation	Reform Social change
4. Synthesise both cultures	Personal growth Self awareness Confidence	Inter-group harmony Cultural preservation Cultural pluralism

There was firstly research, most recently that sponsored by the Overseas Students Trust and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Furnham and Bochner's *Culture Shock*[1] was particularly helpful. Answering the question 'How can we justify the value of culture exchange through students?' they said, there is 'only one absolutely unassailable comment you can make: study abroad can be justified on intrinsic grounds as increasing humankind's sum total of furnished minds', adding 'Unfortunately we are not sure whether this argument will impress politicians' !

Secondly, literature provided important insights, as she showed by reading passages from *The Edifice* by the Nigerian writer Kole Omotosho[2], a novel based on his experience as a student at Edinburgh University. Although this was a first novel, with the failings that implied, its author showed a fine eye for human quirks. She noted that when our differences are identified by skin colour, 'cultural distance' can be exaggerated and interaction made more difficult.

Personal experiences also contributed and she referred to a lifelong friendship that she and her family had made with a Ugandan student in Britain almost forty years ago. As Patron of Overseas Students at the University of Lagos she had gained further insights.

We offer too little opportunity to share British cultural experience

Lalage Bown then outlined a number of basic propositions:—

- We are here using the term culture in the anthropological sense, but exposure to culture in the popular sense (folk culture, art, literature and music) is also important in academic exchange and we offer too little opportunity to share British cultural experience.
- Cultural diffusion is important. No society or academic system can survive without the infusion of new ideas and culture from outside. Students and academics from abroad will breathe new life into our institutions. Thus the early medieval universities of North Africa contributed greatly to intellectual development in Europe; modern mathematics has built on the work of the early Islamic scholars and much of today's sociology has its origins in the work of the Ibn Khaldoun.
- It is essential to remember that the impacts of academic and cultural exchanges are likely to be long term. They will affect social structures and social relationships, institutional arrangements and political processes and relations (between groups and between nations), value systems (including those of higher education itself), and the literature, arts and music of the societies involved.

The impacts of academic and cultural exchanges are likely to be long term

- Although most effects are positive, there can be negative results. If students go home feeling that they have not been treated well and made to feel welcome, there will be a long term cost.

Lalage Bown concluded by underlining how little we knew of cultural interaction in the academic arena. Inadequate language proficiency is a barrier and language problems tend to be underrated. Difficulties with non-verbal forms of communication are accentuated by cultural distance. We should recognise the problems of status faced by those who hold lecturing or consultancy posts in their own countries and who are now students again.

Language problems tend to be underrated

How can cultural interaction be promoted? A survey of 150 foreign students in Britain[3] is relevant. This revealed their 40 most difficult social situations, the top ten being:—

1. Making British friends of own age.
2. Dealing with someone who is cross or aggressive.
3. Approaching others and starting up a friendship.
4. Appearing in front of an audience.
5. Getting to know people in depth.
6. Understanding jokes, humour, sarcasm.
7. Dealing with people staring at you.
8. Taking the initiative to keep a conversation going.
9. Being with people you don't know.
10. Complaining in public and dealing with unsatisfactory service.

1. Adrian Furnham & Stephen Bochner, *Culture Shock*. London, Methuen, 1986.

2. Kole Omotosho, *The Edifice*. London, etc., Heinemann African Writers' Series, 1971.

3. Adrian Furnham & Stephen Bochner, 'Social difference in a foreign culture: an empirical analysis of culture shock'. In S. Bochner (ed.), *Culture in Contact: Studies in Cross-Cultural Interaction*. Oxford, Pergamon, 1982.

There was a need to remember that it was not only British students and academics whose behaviour affected foreign students, but also that of associated staff such as librarians, and all the 'gatekeepers', such as janitors and receptionists, with whom they came into contact.

► In discussion it was suggested that these 'gatekeepers' would benefit from training programmes to develop their sensitivity and interest in people who came from abroad. They were, after all, usually the first point of contact that the visitor has with our institutions. Further examples were given of the ways in which cultural misunderstandings could arise and Lalage Bown was prompted to add two further categories of response to culture contact:—

5. Genuinely bi-cultural people able to manage two cultures (as is sometimes the case when parents come from different cultural backgrounds);
6. Genuinely multi-cultural people such as are seen increasingly in the international organisations: truly international people speaking several languages and at ease in a variety of cultures other than their own.

Discussion Groups

The conference split up into smaller discussion groups to consider the benefits to be gained from having overseas students in our institutions and how these might be realised, or maximised, to the advantage of the students, the institutions, and society at large.

A diverse range of benefits was readily drawn up, which included:—

- The presence of overseas students challenges assumptions and encourages staff to rethink their teaching, both as regards content and teaching methods, examples being given especially from the medical and caring professions.
- Overseas students can bridge the gap in this country between the ethnic communities and the rest of the population, leading to improved mutual understanding.
- Some courses could not continue and some research could not be undertaken were it not for the presence of overseas students. This should be recognised.

A two-way flow must be achieved

Suggestions for improving the overseas student experience included:—

- The formulation of a policy for overseas students, as has been done for home students. This needs to be developed both by institutions and at a national level.
- More schemes and encouragement for British students to gain overseas experience. Essentially a two-way flow must be achieved. This would be helped if the secondary school curriculum had a greater international orientation and schools could arrange more international exchanges.
- A greater internationalisation in the outlook of staff. It would help if opportunities were increased for academics to visit or work abroad.
- More explicit and comprehensive information to be made available to students before they arrive here. It should include information on matters such as the poll tax, driving licence, TV licence and immigration rules.
- Ensuring the relevance of course content, particularly in vocational areas.
- The setting up of English conversation groups, or informal study groups which would bring British and overseas students together on a regular weekly basis.
- The facilitating by institutions of the involvement of overseas students in the local community through churches, schools, local organisations, etc. This is particularly important for families.
- The development of on-going hospitality schemes to counteract the isolation of overseas students, particularly during vacation periods.
- Ensuring that there was always 'after care', even to the saying of "goodbye".

The Academic Benefit

Given all the problems of living abroad, the academic benefits must be thought to make it all worth while, suggested **Pauline Perry**, and there was confirmation for this in Alastair Niven's study[4], in which Commonwealth students gave academic benefits as the decisive reason for coming to this country.

In considering these benefits, she suggested that the truth of the statement 'Knowledge knows no national boundaries' was inherent in everything we did in seeking and welcoming overseas students to our academic institutions and in what the students

4. Alastair Niven, *Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. Tracer Study. Final Report*. London, Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989.

were doing by coming here, By contrast, some of the most restrictive and cruel regimes of the 20th-Century (eg. that of Hitler, or China's 'Gang of Four') have sought to close down universities with the aim of setting up intellectual fences, restricting people's power to think, to dream, and to share. The inscription of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC tells us that "There shall be no dominion over the minds of men" and one objective of higher education is to ensure that boundaries are removed, fences are broken down, and we are free to think across the whole universe of knowledge. The development of a strong 'international commonwealth of ideas' is a basic objective of higher education, and by choosing to leave their countries and study elsewhere, our overseas students have demonstrated that international quality of learning and scholarship.

To many the internationalism of education is self-evident — how deprived we would be if we could study only the arts, or the literature of our own country! Yet there are still some countries where students are not allowed to study elsewhere and where foreign students are not welcome.

Pauline Perry then went on to itemise the benefits, first to the students and then to the receiving community. Students gained:—

- Access to resources, teaching and learning from peers not available elsewhere.

> *Learning about your subject in a different cultural context provides a 'why not' dimension*

- The challenge to intellectual and cultural assumptions offered by learning about your subject in a different cultural context. It provided a 'Why not?' dimension: an ability to question fixed ways of doing things and of thinking. In History this was particularly valuable, as for example, by providing the opportunity to view past wars from the perspective of the losing country. In Engineering, South Bank Polytechnic had gained enormously from the perspective provided by Russian students whose earlier training had focussed more on their minds rather than training them in the use of sophisticated equipment.

For us there was:

- The gain of an international perspective on what we did, allowing us to keep what we perceived as an international body of knowledge genuinely universal.
- Help in raising our own standards by waging war on 'cosiness'. Overseas students also challenged our assumptions.
- An enrichment of our courses and institutions. This was particularly important in areas such as the performing arts, and in vocational courses which provided skills which had to be seen in an international context.

None of this can come about if we, as hosts, do not respect the intellectual and cultural traditions that overseas students bring to this country. And we will only make the most of it if we provide additional time, and sometimes tutorial and language help, to enable them to contribute fully to the academic community and the community at large whilst they are here.

> *We must respect the intellectual and cultural traditions that overseas students bring to this country*

Pauline Perry finished on a practical note, outlining an arrangement which has been introduced at the South Bank Polytechnic. Some institutions gave the impression that they were only interested in the extra money that overseas students brought in. At South Bank each year they published the income brought in in this way and from this made available a sum to each department to provide additional academic help for these students. For the remainder of the money a budget was published showing what was being done to strengthen student welfare services, provide additional English language teaching and more hostel accommodation for overseas students, etc.

Overseas students should not be seen as a source of income but as an enrichment of our academic life. The true benefit from this international academic exchange will only come about if we give them back at least as much as they bring to us.

> *Overseas students should not be seen as a source of income but as an enrichment of our academic life*

▶ Much of the discussion centred on ways in which knowledge exchange, and indeed, the exchange of staff and students, could be made more equal. The notion of metropolis and periphery still coloured our perspectives.

South Bank Polytechnic had commissioned a UKCOSA survey of its provision for overseas students and a concern voiced by students was that

lecturers knew so little about the countries which they came from. One radical suggestion was that institutions should not normally accept students from an overseas country unless they had someone on their staff with knowledge of that country who could provide a focus for students and who could advise his colleagues of their particular strengths and weaknesses.

Unfortunately with increasing insecurity in the British academic system, academics were less prepared to interrupt their work to spend time abroad, particularly in Third World countries where often equipment, which we here take for granted, is lacking for teaching and research. Had the academic community lost the international interest that it once had, possibly as memories receded of the close links we once had with our many ex-colonial territories? An inadequate understanding of the educational systems of other countries could result in students being accepted here with qualifications regarded as substandard in their own countries. It would help enormously in increasing this understanding if more funds were made available to support external examining in overseas countries by academics from Britain.

On the other hand links with Europe were increasing apace — we were becoming Eurocentric — and it was necessary to ensure that these were not at the expense of existing and potential linkages with countries farther afield. Action should be taken on the recommendation of the last Commonwealth Committee on Student Mobility that there should be a scheme similar to ERASMUS set up to promote student interchange between Commonwealth universities.

What do Students Learn from Each Other?

This was a panel session in which four students talked of their experiences. It was chaired by **Alastair Niven**, who opened by suggesting that the learning process for overseas students was in two main areas. In the academic and educational area many would find that the instructional methods used in this country were quite different from those with which they were familiar, with less emphasis on guidance and being told what to think and more on forming independent judgement. Having to cope with a profoundly different way of learning meant that the fellowship of other students — both British and from overseas — was especially important.

The second area of learning concerned human relations, and Dr Niven noted that three years as a postgraduate student at the University of Ghana had been for him far more instructive than the previous three years, spent mainly in the company of like-minded peers at a British university.

Assis Careiro, on leave of absence from the National Ballet of Canada whilst studying for an MA in Dance Studies at the University of Surrey, was the first student speaker. She suggested a dimension not provided for in the session's title — what students learn about themselves. In her case she had suddenly found that for many she represented Canada. This had forced her to confront her 'Canadianness', and she realised that she had attitudes and viewpoints which are very Canadian, and which coloured her day-to-day relations with those she lived with and in the classroom. Another dimension of this was the realisation that she spoke another language — another English.

Malgorzata Kaczmarek, from Poland and a PhD student in experimental physics at Oxford, commented that at first it was easier to get to know non-British students, friendships with students from Britain developing only after the initial reserve was broken down. The student community was a stimulating environment in which to improve language skills and to understand such things as sarcasm and the nuances of humour. It also enabled one to see the problems of one's own country — and Poland has many — in a broader perspective.

Zora Motsa, from Swaziland and an undergraduate in agricultural technology and management at the Cranfield Institute of Technology, thought it rewarding to learn about other people's cultures, but regretted that so few seemed to be interested in her own. Overseas students could feel isolated in the village environment of Cranfield and British students needed to make a special effort to relate to them. Unfortunately at Cranfield overseas students tended to be gathered in an international hall of residence, the halls used by home students being used for conferences in vacations. In this way overseas students' comfort was least disturbed, but it minimised contact with home students.

The final speaker, **Bernard Tan**, was from Singapore and about to complete a BSc in engineering at King's College, London. Referring to the Singapore and Malaysian Society at his college, he drew attention to the usefulness of such organisations in developing understanding of different cultures: they need not be inward-looking. In the end, however, it all came down to the individual, who had to 'conquer himself and reach out to others'.

► A major theme of discussion was the need to help British students, and others, to make the most of the opportunity of meeting overseas students and to make them feel welcome. Was there a case for training in cultural awareness, or of including in

orientation programmes something about the overseas students with whom they will be studying? Certainly there was need to challenge the unthinking assumptions that British social behaviour was the norm and the British academic system the best.

> *We must challenge the assumptions that British social behaviour is the norm and the British academic system the best*

Conversely, overseas students were counselled against seeing British students in homogeneous terms. In many cases home students were adapting to a different lifestyle in an unfamiliar part of Britain, and the majority were younger and less mature than those arriving from overseas whom they saw as sophisticated and exotic!

For their part, overseas students stressed that whilst they accepted their inevitable rôle as ambassadors for their respective countries, it was too easy for them to be seen as Jamaicans or Canadians and not as individuals.

It was difficult to develop codes of behaviour in these areas, but it was suggested that all might have in mind the quotation seen displayed in a Nigerian student's room at Bristol Polytechnic: "Let us celebrate our cultural and ethnic differences together. There are no strangers here, only friends we haven't met".

Closing Address

He was, said **Sir Roy Marshall**, always uplifted to be amongst a group of students and to find such positive attitudes and thinking. From his background of a synthesis of Barbadian and British culture he would have to say much that was critical of the British, but with the best intentions, not out of pique but of disappointment. At a personal level, each one of us can draw up a profit and loss account of our own experiences, and he would, to some extent, do that.

The material arguments for international education were sometimes pushed too far. Whilst familiarity with a country might predispose you to trade with it, that should not override commercial judgment. Similarly, in international relations, it is an insult to a person's intelligence to suggest that because he/she has been educated in your institutions, he/she must blindly support whatever your country does.

> *You can't avoid being an ambassador for your country, and this places responsibility and restraints upon you*

The concept of being a good ambassador was important. You can't avoid being an ambassador for your country, and this places responsibility and restraints upon you.

In his career he had worked in six universities, in Britain, Africa and the Caribbean, and had seen great changes. When he came to Britain as a student, overseas students were treated the same as home students without concession to the differing backgrounds. The learning process was key — the capacity to analyse new material, to absorb it, systematise it, and to apply it. Today courses had become far more technical. Practical relevance is important, but we were in danger of getting priorities wrong.

The world will be faced with the problem of delivering mass higher education and this cannot be done using only traditional methods; no country in the world can provide face to face education for everyone at every level. In industrialised countries there will be increasing emphasis on distance learning but the Developing World has formidable obstacles to overcome to participate fully in that form of training.

Sir Roy then focussed on the development of higher education in the former colonial territories. During the colonial period there was very little emphasis on development, Britain's interest being in law and order, good administration and tight budgets. It produced excellent legal systems, good administrative systems and an education system which supplied trained people to meet specific needs. Britain had the foresight to start university colleges at places like Makerere, Ibadan and the West Indies long before independence.

With independence there was a focus on development and the need for education on a massive scale. A greatly extended provision of free higher education was to create major problems in the seventies when, with the oil crisis and low commodity prices, the terms of trade swung markedly against the developing countries. Corruption, mismanagement, and civil wars in some countries, have not helped. The result has been the decline of higher education institutions, libraries being run-down, equipment not replaced and staff development programmes cut. Despite the expansion of higher education, only a minority of school leavers qualified to enter university were able to find places (e.g., 16% in Nigeria). Thus an increasing number sought

higher education in Britain and other developed countries: At the same time Britain took the retrograde step of introducing full cost fees and removing subsidies from the university system, encouraging the recruitment of overseas students to make up for lost subsidies.

The question has to be asked: who is subsidising whom?

After lobbying by the Overseas Students Trust and others, the impact of full cost fees has been modified by the introduction of scholarships for certain groups, but the amount of money made available in this way is substantially less than that withdrawn. The majority of students are charged full cost fees at the expense of their families or their governments. Now that the costs of teaching home students have been published and categorised into subject groups, comparisons can be drawn. Thus the resource provided for teaching law to an undergraduate home student is £2,200, the tuition fee for an overseas student is £4,500. The question has to be asked: who is subsidising whom? It is accepted that some institutions use some of the surplus for purposes related to overseas students — better housing, language training, etc., but the perception of the overseas student is likely to be that he/she is being overcharged.

What can be done? Sir Roy had chaired a committee of the Commonwealth Secretariat on Student Mobility which had asked for favourable treatment — not equal treatment, just a reduction in fees — for Commonwealth students. Education Ministers and Heads of Government have agreed that "all member countries would in *due course* give consideration to the possibility of a 'favourable fee regime for Commonwealth students". Nothing has yet happened. Another proposal is to extend ERASMUS to Commonwealth students studying in Europe, but that has little prospect of success without British support. There is also a proposal to restore the standards which universities in Commonwealth developing countries once enjoyed by providing an infusion of support, particularly for libraries, management and staff training.

The European Community is providing models of mobility — ERASMUS, COMET, TEMPUS — which will set the sights for Developing Countries, but the focus on Eastern Europe could push the Commonwealth to the end of the queue. To ensure that this does not happen there is need for policy documents on these issues. The UK Committee on Overseas Student Affairs (UKCOSA) and the Overseas Students Trust have been active but bodies such as the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals and the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics seem to have adopted the view that financial constraints have to be accepted and worked with. On a national scale, Britain has an appalling lack of policy on these matters, the White Paper that led to the 1988 Education Reform Act containing just two inconsequential sentences on overseas students, being concerned mainly with the control of institutions, and with little to say about values.

Sir Roy concluded by contrasting the British situation with America. There colleges and university heads have responded to challenges far more positively, seeking to improve the quality of campus life by bringing faculty and students together as scholar citizens with shared aspirations. What he had heard during the conference gave hope that our own higher education institutions might affirm community and in so doing promote the common good in the nation and in the world.

Can the needs of overseas students be met in the dire situation presently facing British universities?

► The question was raised whether the needs of overseas students could be adequately met in the 'dire situation' presently facing British universities; this led to a discussion which focussed on the university crisis in Britain. Sir Roy reflected on his experience as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hull, and it was questioned whether the traditional concept of the university would survive the changes currently taking place. The collegiality of the universities has diminished, and distinct lines were being drawn between management and teachers and researchers, and indeed, between home students and those from overseas. Traditional teaching objectives were being lost to meet the immediate needs of industry and commerce and there was a danger that people would be denied participation in the wider educational process.

The greatest contribution which higher education could make was to facilitate communication — between people of all ages, at all stages and from all countries. It was hoped that the debate currently taking place in this country would not depress but would confirm and strengthen our vision of what a university should really be about, and that overseas students would return to their home countries with a determination to defend that vision.

Report by Geoffrey Williams

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Report published by The King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Foundation of St Catharine's Cumberland Lodge, The Great Park, Windsor, Berkshire, SL4 2HP
Egham (0784) 432316, 434893 and 439258 Fax (0784) 438507

Typeset and printed by Codex Press Limited, Egham (0784) 434630 and Woking (0483) 740359